DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 204 UD 013 264

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TITLE	Family Structure and Attitudes Toward the Family for Negroes and Whites From Lower-Class and Working-Class Backgrounds.
PUB DATE	May 72
NOTE	21p.; paper presented at the Ohio Valley Sociological Society, London, Ont., May 1972; analysis based on data derived in 1963-64
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Caucasians; *Family Attitudes; Family Influence; *Family Structure; Lower Class; Measurement Techniques; Negroes; *Racial Differences; *Sex Differences; Social Adjustment; *Social Differences; Social Problems; Socioeconomic Background; Socioeconomic Status
IDENTIFIERS	Michigan

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with attitudes of family members, and whether such attitudes indeed vary with different family structures. The increasing sociological and psychiatric evidence seems to support the existence of family strengths in families which have been defined as unstable because of structural attributes. Given the historical character of the Negro lower-class family one would expect to find strong attitudes of family identity and integration among female members of the family and some sense of isolation from the family by the adult Negro male. The types of attitudes to be found among their white counterparts have not been documented. A study concerned with the evaluation of retraining workers provided an opportunity to explore the relationships between the family structure of persons applying for retraining in Michigan, and their subjective attitudes toward their families. The research design was a two-stage panel study in which the first stage data used here were derived through an interview schedule and a test battery of attitudinal and psychological items administered during the first week of training. The original sample consisted of 561 persons. The analysis here is based upon a sample of 471 lower-class and working-class adults, male and female, Negro and white. (Author/JM)

ED 073204

Family Structure and Attitudes Toward the Family for Negroes and Whites from Lower-Class and Working-Class Backgrounds

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ABSTRACT

Using the Rundquist-Sletto family integration scale, a test of the relationships between the attitudes toward the family and family structure was made for a sample of 471 lower-class and working-class adults, male and female, Negro and white. Statistically significant differences in mean scores were found between white and Negro males, controlling for family structure. Unattached Negro males lacked identity with family, a phenomenon not found among white males. Positive relationships between family scale scores and having dependent children were found for Negro males and less pronouncedly for Negro females, but not for the white sub-samples.

Family Structure and Attitudes Toward the Family for Negroes and Whites from Lower-Class and Working-Class Backgrounds

The Negro family has been characterized as "pathological" "unstable," and "disorganized" (Frazier, 1939: 347 ff.; Myrdal, 1962: 930-935, Pettigrew, 1964: 15 ff.). These characterizations have been based upon certain normative notions about what a stable and healthy family is like, and on the apparent associations between certain forms of personal disorganization and family structures defined as "pathological" (Mills, 1943: 165-167; Wirth, 1940: 472-482, Waller, 1936: 922-923; Frank, 1925: 462-473; Bernard, 1964: 101-106). Such normative notions concerning the relationships between family form and function to the outcomes of social action have been widely publicized, perhaps no more widely than in the "Moynihan Report" (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1965: chap. 4). The belief underlying such association is that particular family structures contribute to qualities among their members which lead to personal disorganization and anti-social behavior.

With respect to the structural attributes of the family among diverse segments of the American population, the data are widely available (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1966). Indeed, it has been shown that there are higher rates of divorce, desertion, separation, single-parent families and illegitimacy among Negroes than among whites. It has also been demonstrated that the apparent differences in rates are perhaps more a function of socio-economic status than of racial or ethnic patterns (Hill and Jaffe, 1965: 208-212; Herzog, 1966: 5-7). Nevertheless, in absolute terms, the large proportion of such family forms,

if they indeed were evidences of serious family instability and disorganization, might still be grave in their consequences irrespective of the nature of their origins. But there is evidence that merely defining a social characteristic as pathological does not make it so in its functional consequences. Such family forms may not reflect social pathology in either their associations with particular forms of individual and social action, or in the subjective feelings of persons in such families.

It is claimed that a closer study of the lower-class Negro family will show many strengths and relative stability. That such families, indeed, provide positive support for children reared in such families seems to be strongly supported by both sociological and psychiatric evidence (Billingsley, 1968: 142-143: Drake and Cayton, 1962: 564-656, passim; Coles, 1965a: 1107-1126: Erikson, 1966: 159-160; Coles, 1967: 44-45; Baber, 1950: 36; Coles, 1965b).

Attempts to relate family form to a variety of significant attributes of children and adults reared in different family structures suggest that the expected differences which may have been anticipated from the normative definition of the "good," "healthy," and "stable" family do not really exist. Acceptance of the views that particular family forms may be directly associated with anti-social behavior among its family members has led to searches for those variables which may be causally related to the types of anti-social outcomes which were hypothesized to emerge out of such "unstable" family forms.

In research on juvenile delinquency, for example, recent data seem to point to a strong relationship between delinquency and socio-economic status (Chilton, 1964: 71-83; Gordon, 1967: 927-94); the effort to associate delinquency and broken homes has been met by a variety

of contradictory evidence (Cohen and Short, 1966: 119). Studies of the effects of working mothers on the behavior and personalities of children has also been met by inconclusive evidence (Nye and Hoffman, 1963: 6-17; Siegel et al., 1959: 67-81; Hoffman, 1963: 190-212; Burchinal and Rossman, 1961: 334-340. Stolz, 1960: 749-782). Although earlier authorities assumed that the mother's being away from home would have serious consequences for her children, there is little evidence to show that this is the case (cf. Bossard, 1954: 282-286; Nye, 1959: 240-244; Roy, 1961: 340-349). Evidence on the aspirations and motivations of children show some positive relationships between single-parent mother-dominated families and high aspirations of children, particularly for females (Gist and Bennett, 1963: 40-48; Stephenson, 1957: 240-212; Deutch, 1960: 42; Kriesberg, 1963: 341; Clark, 1965: 65; Miller, 1964: 131-132; Lystad, 1961: 281-288; Bell, 1965: 493-500).

Many have seen the single-parent family as a foundation for a variety of maladjustments among youth, particularly males in a matrifocal family. One of the serious structural deficiencies within the Negro family is deemed to be the lack of provision of an adequate male role image for Negro male children and youths. Such literature suggests the serious consequences in adult behavior which emerge from the destruction of masculinity among Negro males (Pettigrew, 1964: 18 ff.; Clark, 1965: 67; Beiser, 1965: 65; Hauser, 1965: 854; Erikson, 1966: 162). And it has been pointed out that the Negro family with the father absent is a relatively large proportion of Negro families (Edwards, 1966: 8-9; Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968: 261; U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1965: 9-11; cf. Billingsley, 1968: 137-140).

Few efforts have been made to move beyond the definitional foundation for the concept of "family disorganization" based, as we have indicated, on normative notions of stability, associated with the structural attributes of the family. Even less effort has been expended to relate stable family life to psychological or attitudinal criteria, reflecting socially meaningful behavior within the context of the family and among its members. Among the few efforts to operationally define a strong family are those of Jansen (1952: 726-733); Miller (1964: 13); and Otto (1962: 77-81).

A serious attempt at defining the "stable" or "strong" family in subjective terms was that of Rundquist and Sletto in the mid-1930's (Rundquist and Sletto, 1936). Interested in "measuring the effects of the depression on the personality and family life of young people," and "the effect of unemployment on personality and family relationships," they constructed scales which they felt were applicable to adolescents as well as to adults (Rundquist and Sletto, 1936: 1, 369). Among their six scales, which as a group measured "general adjustment," was a family scale which at different times they considered as measuring "family adjustment," "disharmonious family relationships," "parent-child relationships and family tensions," and "a poor attitude toward the family" (Rundquist and Sletto, 1936: 2, 1, 209, 213). The reliability of the family scale was relatively high (.83-.86), and the techniques used are models for the construction of Likert-type scales (Edwards: 1957: 161, 168-169, 209).

Patterns of relationship between attitudes and employment were apparent when certain family structural elements were considered such as whether single persons lived with their families or elsewhere. In more detailed analysis, significant relationships were found for males in the

The Family Scale

1. Home is the most pleasant place in the world.
2. Parents expect too much from their children. (N)*
3. One ought to discuss important plans with members of his family.
4. In making plans for the future, parents should be given first consideration.
5. A man should be willing to sacrifice everything for his family.
6. Parents too often expect their grown-up children to obey them. (N)
7. One cannot find as much understanding at home as elsewhere. (N)
8. One owes his greatest obligation to his family.
9. It is hard to keep a pleasant disposition at home. (N)
10. People in the family can be trusted completely.
11. One becomes nervous at home. (N)
12. The joys of family life are much over-rated. (N)
13. One's parents usually treat him fairly and sensibly.
14. One should confide more fully in members of his family.
15. One feels most contented at home.
16. Family ties are strengthened when times are hard.
17. Parents are inclined to be too old-fashioned in their ideas. (N)
18. Members of the family are too curious about one's personal affairs. (N)
19. Parents keep faith in their children even though they cannot find work.
20. Parents are too particular about the kind of company one keeps. (N)
21. Obligations to one's family are a great handicap to a young man today. (N)
22. So far as ideas are concerned, parents and children live in different worlds. (N)

* Reversed scoring

** E. A. Rundquist, and R. F. Sletto, Personality in the Depression. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1936.

sample between family scores and separation of parents (negative), retired status of father (negative), and whether mother was deceased (negative). For women the same patterns of negative association were found between family scores and separation of parents, mother deceased, mother divorced, and mother employed (Rundquist and Sletto, 1936: 202). The scale when used subsequently in the same community with a somewhat different sample showed relatively similar results thirteen years after the initial study (Forsyth, 1939; Ramsey and Nelson, 1956: 605-609).

These samples consisted of white persons and were not controlled for socio-economic background variables. Given a working class population composed of both white and Negro adults, male and female, from a variety of family structures, what would be the relationships between attitudes toward the family and family structure? Would the evidence concerning the strengths found in the Negro single-parent family be manifested in the subjective responses of its members? Do Negro males and females coming from the same family structures as white respondents show significantly different subjective responses to the family?

We are concerned with the attitudes of family members and whether such attitudes indeed vary with different family structures. The increasing sociological and psychiatric evidence seems to support the existence of family strengths in families which have been defined as unstable because of structural attributes. Given the historical character of the Negro lower-class family one would expect to find strong attitudes of family identity and integration among female members of the family and some sense of isolation from the family by the adult Negro male. The types of attitudes to be found among their white counterparts have not been documented, although there seems to be strong dependency relationships of the white working class and lower class female on the

male members of the family (Rainwater, Coleman, Handel, 1962).

The Study Design and the Sample

A study concerned with the evaluation of retraining of workers under the Manpower Development Training Act of 1962 (Nosow, 1968) provided an opportunity to explore the relationships between the family structure of persons applying for retraining in Michigan and their subjective attitudes toward their families. Workers applying for such programs represented both lower-class and working-class populations with a few from lower-middle class backgrounds. Some of these persons were employed at the time they sought retraining in an effort to upgrade their occupational skills. However, among the males, most were unemployed; and among the females most were not even in the labor force but were seeking skills through retraining which would prepare them for gainful employment. The data used for this analysis were derived during the latter part of 1963 and in early 1964.

The research design was a two-stage panel study in which the first stage data used here were derived through an interview schedule and a test battery of attitudinal and psychological items administered during the first week of training to all persons originally interested in entering the respective training course, although some ultimately changed their minds about entering the training program. We did not sample all the types of training courses offered at the time in Michigan, but used a purposive selection to study those types most often established throughout the country for both male and female trainees.

Starting with a random selection of four SMSA's in Michigan from among the ten such areas, we selected 22 courses offering comparability among the four areas and running approximately during the same time period.

The original sample consisted of 561 persons. The analysis here is based upon a sample of 471 respondents. We omitted two special youth courses, two short-term nurse-aide courses, and a computer programming course.

Social and family attributes of the trainees were derived through interview; attitudes toward the family were derived through the Rundquist-Sletto scale which was randomly distributed through a 60-item check list. The choice of responses was collapsed from five to three (agree, disagree, undecided) since we wanted the format compatible with that of the other items used in the check list.

Our study recognizably was exploratory. We had selected the scale for its face validity and its potential applicability to our uses. While we did not test its scalability for this sample we subsequently ran a Spearman-Brown split-half reliability test for internal consistency (Guilford, 1965: 257-258) and found that for the four sub-groups used in our analysis the reliabilities were .72 for white males; .73 for Negro males; .75 for white females; and .86 for Negro females.

The categorical treatment of the data used both the four sub-groups based on race and sex and four family structural types: single-parent with children (single, divorced, widowed, separated); single-persons without children; two-parent family with children; married persons without children.

Although we had no specific hypotheses concerning the relationships between age or education and attitudes toward the family, since there was a range in age and educational background within the total and within the sub-samples, we tested the potential influences of these variables on our outcomes before we tested our main hypotheses.

Using a multiple regression analysis with family scale score as the dependent variable we tested an equation which included race, family structure, age and education, age^2, and interaction variables of the above in various combinations. Both age and education showed little influence on the relationships between family structure and family attitudes and hence are not considered in our subsequent discussion. For simplicity of presentation,the data discussed below are found in analysis of variance tables.

The specific hypotheses tested, put into nul form were: (a) There are no differences in the subjective responses toward the family among persons from different family structures, (b) There are no differences between the subjective responses to the family of Negro and white males, (c) There are no differences between the subjective responses to the family of Negro and white females, (d) There are no differences between the subjective responses to the family of white males and white females, and (e) There are no differences between the subjective responses to the family of Negro males and Negro females.

The Results

The mean family integration scores among the four sub-samples indicate that it is only among the Negro sub-samples that the differences among family integration scores for the various family structures are found (Table 1). The highest family integration scores for Negroes are found among males with dependent children from two-parent families and among females with dependent children from single-parent families. The lowest scores are found among married females without dependent children

Table 1. Mean Family Integration Scores by Race, Sex, and Family Structure

Race and family structure	Sex			
	Male		Female	
	M	SD	M	SD
Negro				
With dependent children				
Single parent family	25.6 (8)	3.9	27.2 (27)	4.9
Two parent family	27.1 (56)	3.4	26.2 (11)	4.0
No dependent children				
Single, div. wid. sep.	23.4 (14)	4.0	24.1 (8)	3.6
Married	25.0 (6)	5.3	21.0 (3)	2.6
Total	26.2 (84)	3.9	26.1 (49)	4.6
White				
With dependent children				
Single parent family	27.8 (4)	3.5	26.5 (39)	3.1
Two parent family	27.2 (103)	3.7	26.6 (43)	3.2
No dependent children				
Single, div. wid. sep.	26.0 (54)	4.4	26.5 (35)	3.7
Married	27.2 (32)	3.8	25.5 (17)	3.7
Total	26.9 (193)	3.9	26.4 (134)	3.3

and among single, divorced, separated, or widowed males and females with no dependent children. Statistical test of the differences in family integration scores among the different family structures was made for both the Negro male and the Negro female sub-samples (Table 2). For males, the differences are highly significant; for females the differences are suggestive but are not significant at the .05 level. We would reject the nul hypothesis of no differences in mean family integration scores among the various family structures, although such differences are attributable to the Negro sub-sample.

These findings are not inconsistent with the descriptions of family relations and attitudes toward self and family described in the literature on the lower-class Negro family. The findings for Negro married females without children are based on very few cases, but their relatively low mean scores, too, suggest the significance placed on children for prestige and adult status among Negroes in this social stratum.

The findings of low family integration scores among the single Negro males is also consistent with the findings which suggest the psychological isolation of this group. To find whether these results are essentially a function of the patterns of family integration which characterize all single males, we tested the differences in mean family scores between Negro and white males. Using a two-way analysis of variance we find that there are significant differences between Negro and white male scores within the respective family structures (Table 3). Although the test of difference in mean integration scores between races shows no significance, a test of difference in family integration scores for the respective family structures does show significant differences, $p < .05$,

Table 2. Analysis of Variance for Negro Male and Female Sub-Samples

Source of Variance (Family Structure)	SS	D.F.	F	Sig.level
Male				
Between cat.	164.90	3	4.08	.009
Within cat.	1076.66	80		
Female				
Between cat.	141.09	3	2.39	.081
Within cat.	884.59	45		

Table 3. Two-Way Analysis of Variance for Negro and White Males

Source of Variance	DF	SS	MS	Sig.
Family	3	143	47.7	.05
Race	1	31	31.0	ns
Family-Race Inter.	3	3779	1259.7	.01
Within-subclasses	269	3953	147.0	
Total	276	7906		

and the interaction between race and family structure is significant at the .01 level.

The differences in mean scores between Negro and white male sub-samples may be interpreted as being associated with the interaction between family structure and race-significant racial differences are found in some of the family structures. These results are consistent with the mean scores for Negro and white males for the various family structures presented in Table 3, where the greatest differences are found between white and Negro males without dependent children, and particularly between those who are single, divorced, widowed, or separated. On the basis of these results, we would reject the nul hypothesis that there are no differences in mean family integration scores between Negro and white males.

When we contrast the differences in mean family scores between Negro males and Negro females, we find differences in mean scores, although the patterns are essentially similar among categories. Statistical test shows significant differences in family structure among Negro respondents, but these differences are not associated with the sex variable and cannot be attributed to the differences between the mean family integration scores of males and females found within the respective family structures (Table 4). The nul hypothesis that there are no differences between Negro males and females must be accepted.

The emphasis which appears in the literature upon the differences between male and female Negroes in the lower classes does not emerge in our results. What tends to be reinforced is the significance of children for attitudes concerning the relationship of the individual to the family, a pattern which is not found for the white sub-sample. Parents, male and female, score the highest on this scale.

Table 4. Two-Way Analysis of Variance for Negro Males and Females

Source of Variance	DF	SS	MS	Sig.
Family	3	249	83.0	.01
Sex	1	0	--	--
Interaction	3	57	19.0	ns
Within-subclasses	125	1962	15.7	
Total	132	2268		

Negro females with no children score lower on the family integration scale than their white counterparts. However, the differences are not significant by race, family structure, or by race and family structure (Table 5). We would have to accept the nul hypothesis that there are no differences between Negro and white females in mean family scores even when the family structure variable is controlled.

Inspection shows little difference between white male and female scores (Table 1). White males score somewhat higher than did white females in all categories except that for "single" with no dependent children. It would appear that the attitudes of white respondents toward the family are not differentiated either by sex or by family structure.

Conclusions

The literature which emphasizes the potential or actual relationships between family structure and forms of social pathology is generally inconsistent and has presented relatively little empirical evidence of such relationships. Perhaps more significant than the structural form of the family to the personal and social behavior of its members are the attitudes toward one another and the patterns of interaction found within the family. Much internal "strength" is said to characterize the lower-class Negro family and much of this strength is said to be associated with the "strong" female personalities arising out of the controlling role of the woman in an historically matrifocal family system. The powerlessness which has emerged for males from this type of family structure has been attributed to the dominant role of the female and the inability of the male to achieve masculinity in societally defined ways. The supportive self-images attributed to the Negro female is said to emerge from the status of mother. Having children

Table 5. Two-Way Analysis of Variance for Negro and White Females

Source of Variance	DF	SS	MS	Sig.
Family	3	67	22.3	ns
Race	1	4	4.0	ns
Family-race interaction	3	90	30.0	ns
Within sub-classes	175	2358	13.5	
Total	182			

is said to be significantly associated with successful adult status. The literature on the white family from the same socio-economic stratum is not clear, but such families have been described as essentially male-dominated. But emphasis here, too, is placed on the status conferring function of having children.

If one assumes that positive attitudes toward the family represent potential strengths which motivate individuals toward efforts for achieving family goals, then the data here generally support the emergent views concerning the strengths among some lower-class families. The findings that within single-parent families, Negro and white, subjective feelings of family integration are high supports previous research which suggests that the disorganization attributed to single-parent families, and said to be conducive to pathological social behavior, may have little basis in fact. Persons from single-parent families do not have scores significantly lower than do persons from two-parent families. The differences among family types for the Negro male suggests that the destructive psychological effects which are said to develop among Negro males in lower-class families are accompanied by low family identity when the individual has no ties to a family of procreation.

Whether identification with family is a psychological strength which is translated into motivational patterns and hence patterns of supportive family activities remains to be tested. This research adds to the growing body of data indicating strengths found within families that are often single-parent, mother dominated. Indeed, research results concerning our respondents who were females from single-parent families show an extraordinarily high level of training completion and successful achievement of training related employment (Nosow, 1968: 5(8)-5(23)).

The feelings of many persons involved in vocational rehabilitation and in processes of job retraining of Negro males concerning the difficulty of motivating them toward occupational achievement may in large part be due to the lack of family ties upon which much motivation for work career seems to be based. Successful social action, of whatever type, and with whatever groups, must be based upon the particular patterns of growth and change for the individual where particular attitudes toward self, work, society, and family emerge, as a basic part of the personality. For the isolated individual, effort toward motivation apparently must be directed toward self-needs and cannot, as for parents with dependent children, be generated from the needs of others.

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